

Levi Pennington

People

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Pennington to Barrow Cadbury, July 6, 1948

Levi T. Pennington

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July 6, 1948.

Dear Friend:--

Your recent air mail letter is received, and I am glad that you have enjoyed All Kinds of Weather.

We were much interested in the news of your family. My father lived to be a great-great-grandfather, but I do not expect that. However, my older granddaughter is to be married, according to present plans, in September. She graduated from Earlham College last month, and they tell me with considerable honor, though neither she nor her parents have done any boasting; indeed I have not had a first hand account of that commencement. I should have wished to be present had it not been that commencement came during Oregon Yearly Meeting, where I felt that I had obligations, but aside from that Rebecca's health was not such that I felt I could be away more than a few hours at a time.

She felt better day before yesterday than any day for months. Not quite so well yesterday, for barking dogs of the neighbors and firecrackers kept her awake too much Sunday night. Yes, celebrating "Independence Day", when the United States declared her independence from England. I am a loyal American, but I wonder if the world would not have been vastly better off if there had been more patience on the part of folks on this side of the water and more statesmanship on the part of the English king and some of his advisors. If all the English-speaking peoples of the world had been united -- but why speculate? What we need to do is to try to make the best of things with the situation what it is, and how to change the world for the better.

The death of Rufus M. Jones, which I suppose surprised nobody greatly, since he was an old man in years, however young in spirit, leaves a great gap in world Quakerdom. Nobody will ever fill his place. Each will have to make a place for himself. The one man whom I have heard mentioned as his possible successor in world influence would in my judgment (maybe it is too severe) have a better chance for high attainment if he were less assured of his own high quality. If I could buy him at my valuation and sell him at his own, though I'd pay a very high price I'd make much on the deal. (Now that is doubtless an unkind remark, and I'd write this letter over again and leave it out if I thought you would have any idea to whom I refer. But I have seen so many lives marred by lack of humility that I dread to see egotism in a man, however great. It may be that this Friend to whom I refer is not as egotistical as he seems, not to me only but to many of those who know him and admire him.)

How I wish that Friends were so united in spirit that one could feel that there was mourning everywhere over the death of Rufus. But I have heard him denounced so many times that I cannot but feel that there are many who will even rejoice that he is gone. And that causes more grief than his passing, deeply as I feel that. He has always been a good

friend to me, and I have appreciated his spirit and his work, his splendid ability and the way he has used it.

His devotion to truth as he saw it was one of his outstanding characteristics. I happened to be in his home the night he was taking it easy after having just done the last stroke of work on his history of Friends in America. The last proof was read, the style of binding determined, the questions whether it should be in one volume or two -- everything was done and he was relaxed for an evening of quiet enjoyment. And he said to me, "Levi, Friends are not going to enjoy this book very much." "Why not?" I asked. "Well," he replied, "it deals with the period of the separations, under the leadership of Elias Hicks and John Wilbur, and I tell the story as it actually was, not as any faction or 'branch' would like to believe that it was. And it is not a nice story, from the standpoint of any division of Quakerdom." That was Rufus; he had to tell the truth as he saw it, no matter whom it helped or harmed, whom it pleased or displeased.

Now he is gone, and he will be greatly missed. But I find comfort in a scripture on which the revised translation threw some new light for me. Jesus, speaking of the church said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it", as the King James translation gives it; but the word is not Gehenna but Hades, "The gates of death shall not prevail." Great leaders die, Moses and Paul and Fox and Wesley and Gurney and Jones, but the gates of death cannot prevail. Men and women of tomorrow who are boys and girls today will carry on, and the Kingdom of God will advance -- may the next generation bring forth better leaders than any of us have been.

Excuse me if I bore you. If one looked at the many divisions among Friends and in the Christian Church, and at the situation in the world today, he could well be discouraged. But if God still lives and is what we have always believed Him to be, the case for the church and for the world is not hopeless. I tried to say something of this sort in "Vision and Faith", but I am sure I did not get it too well said.

With love and best wishes from both of us to you and all yours, I am

Sincerely and gratefully your friend,

Barrow Cadbury,
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England.